

AMERICA ENDED ITS IRAQ MISSION

Withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq



President Barack Obama officially declared on 02 Sep, 2010 the end of the U.S. combat mission in Iraq. For Americans, this moment brings closure to a controversial war. In his speech, Obama focused on the success of the surge and on handing over to Iraqis the responsibility to manage their own security. He also spoke of what he artfully called the "caretaker administration" now in charge of Iraq and encouraged Iraq's leaders to move quickly to form a functioning, representative government.

For Iraqis, the sad truth is that it is difficult to know what to celebrate. The campaign liberated Iraq from a dictator but left the country crippled by political infighting and without a clear future.

President Obama's hasty efforts to place the responsibility

for Iraq's future in the hands of Iraqi officials and citizens alike reveal the glaring lack of political progress there. Five months after the country's parliamentary elections, Iraq has yet to build a functioning government, despite months of heated debate and political posturing.

The U.S. administration's desire to conclude this war and turn its attention elsewhere is understandable, yet America cannot afford to squander the thousands of lives and billions of dollars that have already been exacted to transform Iraq into a democracy.

Obama spoke about the U.S. commitment to Iraq's future as a strong partner, but only once Iraq has a functioning government in place. This is precisely the point where Iraq has foundered for months and precisely where Iraq needs U.S. leadership. This is not

because Iraqis cannot govern themselves, but because the country needs the time required to build the institutions of democracy.

WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. TROOPS FROM IRAQ

The withdrawal of American military forces from Iraq has been a contentious issue within the United States since the beginning of the Iraq War. As the war has progressed from its initial 2003 invasion phase to a multi-year occupation, U.S. public opinion has turned in favor of troop withdrawal. As of May 2007, 55 percent of Americans believed that the Iraq war was a mistake, and 51 percent of registered voters favored troop withdrawal. In late April 2007, the U.S. Congress passed a supplementary spending bill for Iraq that sets a dead-

line for troop withdrawal, but President Bush vetoed this bill soon afterwards. In the wake of that veto, proponents of withdrawal appeared to be shifting towards establishing benchmarks that the Iraqi government will need to meet, a plan that may have been more palatable to former President Bush and his advisers. The U.S. Marine Corps still has eight bases in Iraq.

Immediately before and after the 2003 invasion, most polls within the United States showed a substantial majority supporting war, though since December 2004 polls have consistently shown that a majority now thinks the invasion was a mistake. In the spring of 2007, surveys generally show a majority in favor of setting a timetable for withdrawal. However, in this area responses can vary widely with the exact wording of the question. Surveys find that most favor a gradual withdrawal over time to an immediate pullout.

2004 U.S. Presidential election
The issue was one on which John Kerry and George W. Bush differed in the 2004 U.S. presidential election. Kerry said in August 2004 that he would make the withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Iraq a goal of his first presidential term. However, he did not offer a deadline or a timetable, and proposed an increase in deployment size in the immediate future. In the debate, he said that he reiterated that withdrawal was a goal, if an initial troop increase works.

In the debate, Bush did not offer any timetable or estimate of troops, either increasing or decreasing, but said only that the commanders of the troops in Iraq had the ability to ask for what-

ever force they needed. In general, this is consistent with his earlier remarks. When questioned about troop strength, Bush and then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said that they were using the troops asked for by the general staff.

Congressional Proposals And Acts

On November 17, 2005, Representative John Murtha introduced H.J.Res. 73, a resolution calling

for U.S. forces in Iraq to be "redeployed at the earliest practicable date" to stand as a quick-reaction force in U.S. bases in neighboring countries such as Kuwait. In response, Republicans proposed a resolution that "the deployment of United States forces in Iraq be terminated immediately," without any provision for redeployment, which was voted down 403-3.

On June 16, 2006, the House voted 256-153 in a non-binding resolution against establishing a deadline for the withdrawal of



troops from Iraq. Republican then-House Majority Leader John Boehner, who argued against a deadline, stated "achieving victory is our only option", and "we must not shy away". On the other hand, Democratic then-House Minority Leader and current Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi argued that a deadline is necessary, and stated "'stay the course' is not a strategy, it's a slogan", and "it's time to face the facts."

On March 27, 2007, Congress passed H.R. 1591, which called

for the withdrawal of U.S. troops in Iraq by March 2008. However, President Bush vetoed the bill and the House of Representatives failed to override the veto. Congress then passed H.R. 2206, which provided funding for the Iraq War through September 30, 2007 and was signed into law by President Bush on May 25, 2007. H.R. 2206 included eighteen benchmarks for the Iraqi government to meet.

On May 9, 2007, Representative Jim McGovern introduced H.R. 2237 to the House: "To pro-

vide for the redeployment of United States Armed Forces and defense contractors from Iraq." The bill failed with a vote of 255 to 171, thirteen of the Nays coming from Democrats representing districts won by John Kerry in 2004.

On July 12, 2007 the House passed H.R. 2956 by a vote of 223 to 201, for redeployment (or withdrawal) of U.S. armed forces out of Iraq. The resolution requires most troops to withdraw from Iraq by April 1, 2008.

On July 18, 2007, after an all-night debate, the Senate blocked the passage of a bill that would have set a troop withdrawal timetable with a vote of 52-47. The withdrawal would have started within 120 days, and would have required that all troops (except an unspecified number could be left behind to conduct a very narrow set of missions) be out of the country by April 30, 2008.

McGovern-Polk Proposal

Former U.S. Senator George McGovern and William R. Polk, director of the University of Chicago Center for Middle Eastern Studies, published a detailed proposal for U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in their book, *Out of Iraq: A Practical Plan for Withdrawal Now*. (Simon & Schuster, 2006. ISBN 1-4165-3456-3) A sizable excerpt was published in the October 2006 edition of Harper's magazine. Although their deadline for withdrawal has passed, their plan may serve as a useful blueprint for future withdrawal plans. Some of the basic features of their proposal include:



- The first soldiers to be sent home should be private security contractors.
- An international stabilization force of 15,000 soldiers to be established. Troops will be drawn from Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt, funded by the U.S. This force would remain for two years after the departure of U.S. troops.
- Transport, communications, and light arms equipment currently used by U.S. forces should be donated to the new multinational force.
- In place of a new Iraqi army, a national reconstruction corps should be established, modeled on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- The immediate cessation of work on U.S. military bases.
- U.S. withdrawal from the Green Zone.
- Release of all prisoners of war.

ANSWER, NION, UFPJ positions

The three largest coalitions which organized demonstration-

tions against the invasion of Iraq in 2003, United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (ANSWER), and Not in Our Name (NION), have all called for the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops, "out now." The anti-war movement has debated whether to support existing proposals in Congress. The UFPJ legislative working group has endorsed Murtha's re-deployment proposal "because it is a powerful vehicle to begin the debate on the war," though the organization as a whole has not taken a position. ANSWER, on the other hand, has stated that "Murtha has not adopted an antiwar position. He wants to re-deploy militarily to strengthen the hand of

U.S. imperialism in the Middle East."

Burner Plan

The Burner Plan, formally entitled A Responsible Plan to End the War in Iraq, is a 36-page policy paper presented March 17, 2008 by Darcy Burner and other 2008 Democratic congressional candidates, in cooperation with some retired national security officials. The plan outlined policy measures the candidates pledged





to support in the United States presidential election, 2008.

President Obama's speech on February 27, 2009

On February 27, 2009, at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, President Barack Obama announced a deadline for the withdrawal of combat troops from Iraq. According to the president, by August 31, 2010, after nearly seven and a half years of United States military engagement in Iraq, all but a "transitional force" of 35,000 to 50,000 troops would be withdrawn from the Middle Eastern nation. Obama defined the task of the transitional force as "training, equipping, and advising Iraqi Security Forces as long as they remain non-sectarian; conducting targeted counter-terrorism missions; and protecting our ongoing civilian and military efforts within Iraq". Under this plan, the majority of troops will be withdrawn

just a month after the deadline in the signed agreement between former President George W. Bush and Prime Minister of Iraq Nouri al-Maliki where the majority of troops will be withdrawn at one point, and the entirety of troops to be out by December 31, 2011. The events of August 19, 2010 On August 19, 2010, the last US "combat brigade" withdrew from Iraq. However, about 50,000 US troops will remain in the country in what the US calls "an advisory capacity." According to the US, they will help to train Iraqi forces in a new mission dubbed by the US as "Operation New Dawn," which will run until the end of 2011. The mission that ended August 19, 2010 was dubbed by the US as "Operation Iraqi Freedom," and has cost more than \$900 billion and seen 4,415 US troops die. 100,000 Iraqi civilians were estimated to be killed, according to the Iraq Body Count website.

The U.S. Marine Corps still has seven bases in Iraq, and there are an unknown number of pri-

vate military companies active in Iraq.

This plan falls almost into perfect alignment with the one signed by President George W. Bush and then prime-minister Nouri Al-Maliki, with the exception of being a month behind, as the majority of troops under that plan were supposed to be withdrawn by June 30, 2010 with all troops being withdrawn by December 31, 2011.

Plans for the future

By October 2011, the US State Department will assume responsibility for training the Iraqi police and this task that will largely be carried out by private contractors. American diplomats in two new \$100 million outposts will prevent potential confrontations between the Iraqi Army and Kurdish peshmerga forces.

The US State Department is reportedly planning to more than double the number of its private

security guards, up to as many as 7,000. Defending five fortified compounds across the country, the security contractors would operate radars to warn of enemy rocket attacks, search for roadside bombs, fly reconnaissance drones and even staff quick reaction forces to aid civilians in distress. The State Department plans to acquire 60 mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicles (MRAPs) from the US military to expand its inventory of armored cars to 1,320 and to create a mini-air fleet by buying three planes to add to its lone aircraft. Its helicopter fleet, which will be piloted by contractors, will grow to 29 from 17.

The startup cost of building and sustaining two US embassy branch offices in Kirkuk and Mosul, of setting up two consulates in Basra and Erbil and of hiring security contractors and buying new equipment is about \$1 billion. It will also cost about \$500 million to make the two consulates permanent. The police training program will cost about \$800 million.

What America Left Behind in Iraq

Hundreds of cars waiting in the heat to slowly pass through one of the dozens of checkpoints and searches they must endure every day. The constant roar of generators. The smell of fuel, of sewage, of kabobs. Automatic weapons pointed at your head out of military vehicles, out of SUVs with tinted windows. Mountains of garbage. Rumors of the latest assassination or explosion. Welcome to the new Iraq, same as the old Iraq -- even if Barack

Obama has declared George W. Bush's Operation Iraqi Freedom over and announced the beginning of his own Operation New Dawn, and Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has declared Iraq sovereign and independent.

Iraq has had several declarations of sovereignty since the first one in June 2004. As with earlier milestones, it's not clear what exactly this one means. Since the Americans have declared the end of combat operations, U.S. Stryker and MRAP vehicles can be seen conducting patrols without Iraqi escorts in parts of the country and the Americans continue to conduct unilateral military op-

pre-emptively.

Iraq is still being held back from full independence -- and not merely by the presence of 50,000 U.S. soldiers. The Status of Forces Agreement, which stipulates that U.S. forces will be totally out by 2011, deprives Iraq of full sovereignty. The U.N.'s Chapter 7 sanctions force Iraq to pay 5 percent of its oil revenues in reparations, mostly to the Kuwaitis, denying Iraqis full sovereignty and isolating them from the international financial community. Saudi and Iranian interference, both political and financial, has also limited Iraq's scope for democracy and sovereignty. Throughout the oc-



erations in Mosul and elsewhere, even if under the guise of "force protection" or "countering improvised explosive devices." American military officers in Iraq told me they were irate with the politically driven announcement from the White House that combat troops had withdrawn. Those remaining still consider themselves combat troops, and commanders say there is little change in their rules of engagement -- they will still respond to threats

cupation, major decisions concerning the shape of Iraq have been made by the Americans with no input or say by the Iraqis: the economic system, the political regime, the army and its loyalties, the control over airspace, and the formation of all kinds of militias and tribal military groups. The effects will linger for decades, regardless of any future milestones the United States might want to announce.

The Americans, meanwhile,

worry about losing their leverage at a time when concerns still run high about a renewed insurgency, Shiite militias, and the explosion of the Arab-Kurdish powder keg everybody's been talking about for the last seven years. Many in the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad wonder what Obama's vision for Iraq is. By the summer of 2006, Bush woke up every day and wanted to know what was happening in Iraq. Obama is much more detached.

American diplomats also worry that they will soon lose their ability to understand and influence the country. In addition to Baghdad, there will soon be only four other posts. Much of the south will be without any U.S. presence: There will be no Americans between Basra and Baghdad, no Americans in Anbar or Salahuddin provinces.

At best, unable to secure areas to visit by helicopter or communicate with Iraqis navigating the hassle of trying to get into the Green Zone, the diplomats in the four outposts will act as listening posts or trip wires. They hope to be viewed as the honest broker between Kurds and Arabs in northern Iraq, where the American focus has shifted as part of the consolidation of "strategic gain."

But staffers complain that they lack the funding to do their job right, even though the four posts outside Baghdad are going to be very expensive. They say the United States has spent hundreds of billions of dollars on the war in Iraq but is now pinching its pennies over secretarial salaries.

One hope for change rested on this year's national election, held on March 7, which ended in a virtual tie between former

Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's Iraqiya party and Maliki's State of Law Coalition. The election nonetheless did represent a milestone in the country's political evolution. Regardless of the outcome -- Maliki contested but could not overturn the vote count -- the elections will not precipitate a return to civil war. The state is strong, and the security forces take their work seriously -- perhaps too seriously. The sectarian militias have been beaten and marginalized, and the Sunnis have accepted their loss in the civil war.

But the controversies surrounding the still-unresolved contest point to some serious long-term political rifts. The increased pace of the U.S. withdrawal coupled with the still-unresolved state of the political map and meddling by the United States, the Saudis, Iran, and even Turkey, has led to a vicious zero-sum competition as Iraqi leaders jockey for power.

Maliki was a popular candidate, supported by Iraqis for having crushed both Sunni and Shiite armed groups, and he came in first as an individual politician, with Allawi a distant second. But

Maliki's candidates came a close second to Iraqiya -- a surprise after Allawi's dismal performance in 2005.

On the Allawi side are Sunnis, restless with perceived Iranian influence in the country. Opposition to Maliki often centers on his suspected ties to Iran -- an allegation that echoes the tendentious Sunni notion that an Arab cannot have a strong Shiite identity without being pro-Iranian. And notwithstanding the Bush administration's "80 percent" approach -- focusing on the Shiites and Kurds and ignoring the Sunnis -- the group's frustration could lead to destabilization. Sunnis might not be able to overthrow the new Shiite sectarian order, but they can still mount a limited challenge to it. The Kurds, with only the mountains as their friends (to paraphrase a Kurdish proverb), were able to destabilize Iraq for 80 years. Sunni Arabs are present in much more of the country and have allies throughout the Arab world who can supply them well enough to destabilize Iraq more than the Kurds ever could.

In fact, Iraq's powerful neighbor has failed to achieve many of its goals in Iraq. Iran has pawns in



Iraq but not proxies. Even the Iran-formed Shiite Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq actually dislikes Iran. Its members, former Iraqi exiles who came together in Tehran during Saddam's rule, remember the humiliation of being looked down upon by Iranians for being Arabs. Shiite parties have their own power base as well, and don't need Iranian support. Still, the Iranian ambassador in Baghdad remains very active, and the Americans refuse to meet with him -- a surprising change given the meetings that took place under the Bush administration.

As for the Turks, they want to turn the Kurdish regional government in the north into a Turkish vassal state. They are also deeply involved in Baghdad. Ambassador Jeffrey maintains that Turkey can live with a Maliki premiership, and this is true, although Turkey prefers Allawi; the Turkish ambassador dislikes Maliki and helped organize the Iraqiya list. (Maliki took this personally and temporarily stripped the Turkish ambassador of his access to the Green Zone.)

In a sad sense, none of this

maneuvering actually matters all that much. Regardless of who becomes prime minister or president, Iraq is about to become increasingly authoritarian. Oil revenues will not kick in for several years, so services are not going to improve. Even when revenues reach Iraqi coffers, infrastructure costs will eat them up for the near future. The lack of services means the government will face street-level dissatisfaction and become harsher and more dictatorial in response -- even if a democratic façade persists.

For Iraqis, then, there is no end in sight. Since the occupation began in 2003, more than 70,000 Iraqis have been killed. Many more have been injured. There are millions of new widows and orphans. Millions have fled their homes. Tens of thousands of Iraqi men have spent years in prisons. The new Iraqi state is among the most corrupt in the world. It is only effective at being brutal and providing a minimum level of security. It fails to provide adequate services to its people, millions of whom are barely able to survive. Iraqis are traumatized. Every day

there are assassinations with silenced pistols and the small magnetic car bombs known as sticky bombs. In neighboring countries, hundreds of thousands of refugees languish in exile, sectarianism is on the upswing, and weapons, tactics, and veterans of the Iraqi jihad are spreading.

Seven years after the disastrous American invasion, the cruelest irony in Iraq is that, in a perverse way, the neoconservative dream of creating a moderate, democratic U.S. ally in the region to counterbalance Iran and Saudi Arabia has come to fruition. But even if violence in Iraq continues to decline and the government becomes a model of democracy, no one will look to Iraq as a leader. People in the region remember -- even if the West has forgotten -- the seven years of chaos, violence, and terror. To them, this is what Iraq symbolizes. Thanks to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and other failed U.S. policies in the broader Middle East, the United States has lost most of its influence on Arab people, even if it can still exert pressure on some Arab regimes.





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